

[redacted]

From: [redacted] on behalf of Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training
Sent: 16 September 2022 13:41
To: james@jrwithers.com
Cc: Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training
Subject: Letter from Mr Jamie Hepburn
Attachments: Skills Review - 2022 - Appointment of Independent Lead - JW Letter of Appointment - 16 September.pdf

Good afternoon

Please find attached a letter for your attention from Mr Jamie Hepburn.

Many thanks
[redacted]

Private Secretary – Minister for Higher/Further Education, Youth Employment and Training – Jamie Hepburn MSP
St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG - [redacted]
Email: MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot

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[redacted]

From: [redacted] on behalf of Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training
Sent: 21 September 2022 11:45
To: [redacted]
Subject: FW: Letter from Mr Jamie Hepburn
Attachments: Skills Review - 2022 - JW Letter of Appointment - 16 September.pdf

Here you go 😊

[redacted]

Private Secretary – Minister for Higher/Further Education, Youth Employment and Training – Jamie Hepburn MSP
St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG - [redacted]
Email: MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot

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From: James Withers <james@jrwithers.com>
Sent: 21 September 2022 11:42
To: Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training <MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot>
Cc: Reid A (Adam) <Adam.Reid@gov.scot>
Subject: RE: Letter from Mr Jamie Hepburn

Morning Rachael

Many thanks for the letter of appointment. I am content with all the detail within it and I have signed and completed the relevant forms.

Please find attached my signed and completed paperwork confirming my acceptance of this appointment.

All the best
James

James Withers
JR Withers Advisory Ltd

M: [redacted]
E: james@jrwithers.com



From: [redacted] gov.scot> On Behalf Of MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot
Sent: 16 September 2022 13:41
To: James Withers <james@jrwithers.com>
Cc: MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot
Subject: Letter from Mr Jamie Hepburn

Good afternoon

Please find attached a letter for your attention from Mr Jamie Hepburn.

Many thanks

[redacted]

Private Secretary – Minister for Higher/Further Education, Youth Employment and Training – Jamie Hepburn MSP
St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG [redacted]
Email: MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot

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[redacted]

From: [redacted] on behalf of zzzMinister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training 2021 to 2023
Sent: 28 February 2023 16:12
To: james@jrwithers.com
Cc: zzzMinister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training 2021 to 2023; Reid A (Adam)
Subject: FW: Scan-to-Me
Attachments: James Withers.pdf

Good afternoon James

Please find attached letter from Mr Hepburn for your attention.

Many thanks

[redacted]

Private Secretary – Minister for Higher/Further Education, Youth Employment and Training – Jamie Hepburn MSP
St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG - [redacted]
Email: MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot

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[redacted]

If the Minister is content, I wasn't intending to provide further material, beyond the attached report, as briefing in advance of the meeting with James Withers on Tuesday morning.

In terms of an agenda, the review secretariat has flagged that James wishes to cover progress since the last meeting on:

- (a) approach and engagement
- (b) themes emerging from early deliberations

I'll be joining the meeting.

Thanks,
Adam

Adam Reid | Deputy Director, Skills | Skills Division | Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Skills | Scottish Government

5 Atlantic Quay, Glasgow

[redacted]

@AdamM_Reid

From: [redacted]@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Skills Delivery Review

Sent: 07 February 2023 11:54

To: Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training <MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot>

Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>; Skills Delivery Review <skillsdeliveryreview@gov.scot>; Reid A (Adam) <Adam.Reid@gov.scot>; Director for Lifelong Learning and Skills <DirectorforLifelongLearningandSkills@gov.scot>; Livey D (David) <David.Livey@gov.scot>

Subject: Independent Review of the Skills Delivery landscape- 2nd update progress report

[redacted]

Please find attached the 2nd progress report (3 pages) from James Withers. The Minister is due to meet with James 21 Feb.

Please do let me know if you have any queries.

[redacted]

Independent Review Secretariat| Skills Delivery Landscape

I can be contacted by:

Email: [redacted]@gov.scot

Mailbox: skillsdeliveryreview@gov.scot

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE SKILLS DELIVERY LANDSCAPE

Second Progress Report- February 2023

Background

At our meeting on 15 November last year, I set out my progress in gathering evidence and insights from across the range of individuals, users and stakeholders involved in the skills delivery landscape in Scotland.

This engagement has reflected my desire to ensure that the recommendations I have been asked to make to Scottish Ministers in Spring 2023, as set out in the Terms of Reference for the Review, are fully informed by a robust evidence base and that all those who wished to have their say have had the opportunity to do so.

This is the second of two progress reports that I am required to submit before I provide my draft report and recommendations to the Scottish Government in March 2023. This report focuses on the emerging outcomes from the engagement and the approach I am taking to developing recommendations based on the evidence and insights gathered.

Approach to the Review

As set out in my first progress report, I have approached my work on the Review in two phases. The first was aimed at building my understanding of the different partners involved in the skills system, their interactions with each other, what areas were working well and what could be improved.

The second phase of the Review process, and my immediate priority now, is focussed on working through what I have heard, understanding the themes emerging from the Call for Evidence and formulating my recommendations into a report that delivers against the Terms of Reference and fulfils my remit.

Evidence and Insights Gathering

As detailed in my first report the approach to evidence and insight gathering has involved a range of engagement activities as part of building my own knowledge of the system and enabling stakeholders, including system users to outline their views and ideas.

That phase is now largely complete and, I believe, has delivered against my ambitions and expectations. The call for evidence, which was the main vehicle for people and organisations to provide their views, ran for eight weeks from the end of October to December. We have received 164 submissions which is positive and reflects the significant interest in the subject area. The responses include submissions from key public bodies themselves including Scottish Funding Council and Skills Development Scotland as well as a range of colleges, universities, local authorities, individuals, businesses and third sector bodies. Analysis of these is ongoing and a full report will be provided alongside my recommendations.

To aid the evidence process, my secretariat hosted eleven webinar sessions aimed at different users and audiences within the skills delivery landscape. Sessions were held with businesses, local authorities, training providers, colleges and universities and apprentices. The Secretariat also engaged with a range of young people through organisations and groups to understand their views on the strengths of the system and the barriers they face as they navigate education and skills. I attended a number of these sessions and found them all to be very engaging and insightful, particularly the meeting I had with the Young Scot Leadership Panel and the webinar with apprentices.

When we met previously I indicated that as well as spending some time getting to know key public agencies, that I was keen to get out and visit people and places. I have been pleased to have been able to spend time meeting people at the front end of service delivery in colleges and universities. I also hosted a staff session with Skills Development Scotland to hear their first hand experiences of what is working well and ideas for how to adapt and respond to the challenges ahead.

Developing my recommendations

My Secretariat are commissioning a formal analysis of the call for evidence responses and material collected through the webinars and engagement sessions, to ensure that there is a written summary of the key themes that have emerged through the Review. This will provide the analytical platform for the recommendations I make.

My priority now is to distil the different views and ideas that I have heard into a set of clear and realistic recommendations for Ministers which address some of the deficits in the system. These will undoubtedly build on some of the initial reflections and themes that I shared with you at our meeting in November, which I have found to be echoed throughout my subsequent engagements and the evidence submissions.

In particular I will be focusing on the key tensions I have observed in and between different parts of the system - between national and local level delivery, in the responsibilities and philosophies of national agencies, in the mix of provision and funding, and between the needs of different system 'users'.

One challenge I have found is that, whilst the engagement process and evidence gathered will be critical to developing my recommendations, organisations and individuals have naturally tended to focus on their own role in delivery or part of the landscape rather than looking for solutions to system wide issues. In coming to my recommendations I am mindful there is no overwhelming consensus as to what should change, only that change is required.

I look forward to meeting you on 21 February, when I hope to be in a position to share further some of my thinking about the areas where I intend to make recommendations.

Dependencies

I highlighted in my first report my awareness of the interdependencies between this Review and the wider programme of education reform in which the Scottish

Government is engaged. With this in mind, I have made connections with Professor Hayward and Professor Alma Harris and have further meetings planned with each to discuss the interconnections between our respective work.

I also continue to be sighted on the development of the Purpose and Principles for Post-School education and skills and am committed to ensuring that my recommendations are aligned to the outcomes arising from these projects, to give you the best chance of achieving a joined up programme of reform of education and skills in Scotland.

James Withers
3 February 2023

INDEPENDENT REVIEW OF THE SKILLS DELIVERY LANDSCAPE

First Progress Report- November 2022

Background

In September 2022, I was appointed to carry out an independent review of the skills delivery landscape in Scotland as part of work to ensure that the skills system is fit for purpose for delivering Scotland's national outcomes and meeting future economic challenges including the transition to net zero.

My remit, set out in the Terms of Reference for the Review, requires me to engage widely with stakeholders across the post-school skills and education landscape to inform recommendations to Ministers on how the public body and advisory landscape should be adapted to drive forward ambitions for skills. It also asked that I report my progress to Ministers at agreed intervals. This is the first of my progress reports.

Approach to the Review

Since commencing my appointment in late September, I have worked with my Secretariat to devise and adopt a two phased approach to the Review. The initial phase of engagement and insight gathering which is now underway until December is focusing on building an understanding of the wider skills landscape and the roles of the different actors and institutions involved in delivery and identifying areas of the system where outcomes are not currently optimal in order to focus my thinking.

The second phase of the Review, which will commence in January, until I report to you in Spring 2023, will focus on analysing the information and evidence I have gathered, and developing and testing assumptions to inform my final recommendations.

Engagement and insight gathering

I have set out to ensure that the Review is underpinned by an engagement approach which presents an opportunity for all interested parties to feed in their views.

With this in mind, engagement is being taken forward through the following methods:

- My direct engagement with stakeholders
- Written call for evidence
- Webinar sessions allied to the call for evidence
- Young people engagement

Direct engagement

I began my direct engagement programme with inception meetings with Skills Development Scotland (SDS) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC) as two of the key agencies identified in the Terms of Reference for the Review.

I subsequently had several 'deep dive' sessions with SDS to attempt to get under the skin of that agency, its various functions, structure and resources and I'll be doing similar with the SFC in the coming weeks. I also attended the SDS Board meeting and have met with the unions representing SDS to get their advice on how I can best engage with its staff base.

The relationships I have established with the two agencies have been largely positive and cooperative.

More widely, I have held initial discussions with the other national agencies in the landscape including the enterprise agencies, HIE and SOSE education bodies, HMIE and SQA, representatives of the Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) and a number of critical friends. All have been enormously helpful in supporting my knowledge and understanding of the system and I've continued to be struck by the passion that there is for this Review and the desire to 'get it right'.

The next phase of my engagement is focussed on the user, including businesses, to understand their experiences of the system and what they see as being required to develop the ambitions set out in NSET. As part of this, my engagement will focus on getting 'out and about' across the country to visit organisations and institutions and to see skills delivery in action.

Written Call for Evidence

I launched a call for evidence on 28 October to ensure that there was a vehicle which would allow everyone with an interest to have their say.

It involves general questions on the skills delivery landscape as well as specific questions on some of the functional areas identified in the Terms of Reference - including apprenticeship design and delivery, occupational standards and sector and regional skills planning.

The Call for Evidence will run for 8 weeks till 23 December 2022. Responses will be independently analysed and used to support the recommendations in the Report.

Webinar Sessions

Alongside the call for evidence, a series of webinar sessions have been designed to gather views from specific audiences with a range of interests across the Skills landscape.

The sessions will run during the call for evidence period and are designed to focus on key areas groups wish to discuss.

Whilst the notes from these discussions will also form part of the evidence gathering, and individuals will still be encouraged to submit call for evidence responses.

Young person engagement

Running alongside the webinars are sessions designed specifically to get the views of young people. These sessions will be more tailored to ensure that the questions can support young people to give their views in a way that suits their needs and requirements.

Early reflections

I set out some of my early reflections on my engagement so far when we met on 15 November. Whilst it is still early in the process, and I am keen not to get ahead of the evidence gathering process, what I have heard in my discussions has reinforced the rationale for this Review, particularly in terms of the complexity in the system and the respective roles and responsibilities of its different actors.

I don't see complexity as a necessarily a failure, in many ways it can be a characteristic of success if it allows for targeted interventions recognising bespoke needs. It does, however, make it more challenging to hold the system or its constituent parts to account and it can be a very confusing picture for many stakeholders to navigate. This can lead to a lack of faith in the system and sometimes a lack of clarity about who is doing what, particularly in the public sector bodies, but also in the balance between public and private actors involved.

My discussions have indicated that there is an appetite for changes to better serve the end users of the system and there is a collective enthusiasm across the landscape to get this right. It is too early for me to comment meaningfully on what changes may be required. However, of the people I have engaged with, all have felt that changes are required to support future delivery of the skills system to meet the ambitions set out in NSET and the changing nature of our economy, communities and workplace.

I look forward to continuing to build on the engagement to date and being in a position to update more fully on themes emerging in the next report.

Dependencies

I am very conscious, as we have discussed, that my work is not taking place in a vacuum and there are a number of wider reviews that are ongoing and at different stages of development.

I have been particularly keen to engage closely with Scottish Government officials working on the purpose and principles for post-school education and skills development, recognising the links between the vision and outcomes that it will set out, and the potential role of my Review in recommending the structures that will underpin those.

My Secretariat continue to engage closely with the leads of the various education reform programmes to ensure that my recommendations are set within this context.

James Withers
18 November 2022

Note of meeting between Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training and James Withers, Independent Advisor on the Skills Delivery Review, 21 February.

- James Withers (JW) outlined the progress he had made since the last meeting. He touched on the Call for evidence process, his engagement across the agencies and wider stakeholders and outlined his immediate priority was in understanding and analysing the evidence to allow for recommendations to be made. JW indicated that there was a need and opportunity to evolve the skills system so it could provide a competitive advantage for Scotland.
- He explained the interactions with other reviews particularly discussions with Professor Hayward on qualifications and Grahame Smith on careers. There had also been meetings with the Review team leading on the national discussion on education. He outlined that where there were opportunities for reviews to give a consistent approach on related themes there was a willingness for review leads to work together on messaging.
- JW provided some further reflections on what was emerging from the evidence. The themes were a continuation of initial reflections including the overlap between agency responsibilities, the complexity of the current system, and how the national and local approach could work to best effect. JW reflected on the consistent message that there was a need for significant change if the system was to be recalibrated to meet future demographic challenges and to deliver NSET.
- The Minister indicated that he welcomed the processes put in place to support the Review and would be happy to consider deliberations providing they were within the scope of the TOR. However, he was clear that the review deliberations, findings and process were for James to determine in his role as independent advisor.
- JW outlined that as well as his report and recommendations, independent analysis of the consultation responses was being developed and would also be published. He indicated that the contracting of the analysis had been slightly delayed from its original timescales. JW stressed the need for his recommendations to be fully informed by the analysis and indicated that to do so aspects of his reports might slip into April, although still within the Spring timescales set out in the TOR.
- JW indicated that he was due to send an interim report to the Minister by 10 March that would set out his initial thinking and some early priorities for change.

Action: James to send the draft report for 10 March.

**Independent Review Secretariat
February 2023**

[redacted]

From: [redacted] on behalf of Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training
Sent: 02 March 2023 16:26
To: Skills Delivery Review; Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training
Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills; Reid A (Adam); Livey D (David); Director for Lifelong Learning and Skills
Subject: RE: Skills Delivery Independent Review- Read out and note of meeting with James Withers 21 Feb 20223
Categories: [redacted]
1

This email is for the official record and confirms a Ministerial Decision. This email must be placed in the official record (eRDM) by your team [in line with SG records management policy](#).

[redacted]

Mr Hepburn is content. Grateful for a link when you can.

Thanks
[redacted]

Private Secretary – Minister for Higher/Further Education, Youth Employment and Training – Jamie Hepburn MSP
St Andrews House, Regent Road, Edinburgh, EH1 3DG - [redacted]
Email: MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot

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From: [redacted] <[redacted]@gov.scot> **On Behalf Of** Skills Delivery Review
Sent: 01 March 2023 13:58
To: Minister for HE, FE, Youth Employment and Training <MinisterHEFEYET@gov.scot>
Cc: Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills <CabSecES@gov.scot>; Adam Reid <Adam.Reid@gov.scot>; David Livey <David.Livey@gov.scot>; Director for Lifelong Learning and Skills <DirectorforLifelongLearningandSkills@gov.scot>; Skills Delivery Review <skillsdeliveryreview@gov.scot>
Subject: Skills Delivery Independent Review- Read out and note of meeting with James Withers 21 Feb 20223
[redacted]

Please find a one page note of the meeting 21 Feb.
Grateful if you could ask the Minister to review and signal whether the Minister is content.

[redacted]

Independent Review Secretariat| Skills Delivery Landscape

I can be contacted by:

Email: [redacted] [gov.scot](#)

Mailbox: skillsdeliveryreview@gov.scot